7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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PARSLEY

824 763 When one plucks a stem of parsley by the roots and plants it again he may expect to lose one of his parents within the year.

THE HEN

825 763 When a hen crows it is at once destroyed as it foretells the death of some member of the family.

THE HAWKMOTH OR SPHINX

825 787 The appearance of a white hawkmoth betokens the coming home of some one who is abroad. The appearance of a black hawkmoth, however, is a harbinger of sad news.

COMETS

•821 787 The appearance of a comet is a sign of an approaching evil.

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"In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee. . . ."

In all other things they remain children and "of such is the Kingdom. . . ."

So that the curse of Adam may lie less heavily upon these children of an unfertile rock, the Old Things have blessed them with an uncanny ability to make flowering fields out of nothing.[1]

THE SKY AND THE SOIL

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171
[369]

The weather and husbandry lore of the peasant has much to do with the success of his untiring hands. Much of this peasant wisdom is incomprehensible to the town-bred Maltese (too often they have lost touch or dismiss it—in hybrid Italian—as *ignuranza*); much of it has exact parallels in the lore of the English countryside, as for example the following:

Maltese	*English*
"The Moon eats everything."	"Fair weather with a full moon."
"The stars wink at the coming wind."	"Twinkling stars foretell high winds."
"Sky like a turtle's back; heavy rains, fierce winds."	"A rounded cloud with flattened base carries rainfall in its face."
"Clouds with heads of men and beasts bring in the thunder and the lightning."	

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[248]

[1] During the early years of the last century Malta's cotton crop was valued at an average of one and a half millions sterling annually. The cotton industry, dating from Roman times and earlier, is now practically dead.

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Maltese	*English*
"Red sky at evening, harness your mules. Red sky at morning, herd your beasts."	"Red sky at night, Shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning Shepherd's warning."
"Ill weather comes, ahead or astern, when the cat sneezes."	"The cat washes herself before stormy weather."

Often it appears that sheer nonsense is mixed with sound common sense. Typical of the mixed "sense" and "nonsense" is the following:

"The first autumnal produce of the wild fig is called by the Maltese *Barru*. A second crop which takes place in winter is supposed to be due to the outcome of the first produce. This is called *Carru*, and is supposed to bring forth the third outcrop which appears in spring time and is recognized as the *dukkar* or real fertilizer of the fig. This fruit is cut and hung up in pairs on the bough of the fig tree.

"The male fruit (*dukkar*) is usually full of a colony of minute winged insects by the produce of which, the Maltese husbandman identifies the real fertilizing fruit.

"The pomegranate is supposed to be fertilized by the flowers of the wild parsnip, and for this purpose bunches of these flowers are thrown over the pomegranate tree when in flower. *Dakra*, probably from *dakar* = to fertilize, is the name given to the wild parsnip by the Maltese husbandman.

"The male flowers of the wild carob-tree (*baghal*) are thrown over the branches of the female plant to favour impregnation.

Small pieces of coarse stone are still hung up in the jujube-tree with a view to securing a good produce.

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of the eternal and immutable nature of the All-Father whose symbol the rock is. 776 823

THE MONTHS

The Maltese, like the Scandinavians and the Russians, personify the months, giving to each a human character in keeping with its weather. A delightful little story called "The Gifts of the Months" serves the dual purpose of impressing the qualities of each month upon the listener, while stressing the importance of accepting the best qualities in every season without complaining about the disadvantages. Two brothers, one a poor peasant, the other a rich merchant, each meet the twelve months. On being questioned as to what people say about the months in his part of the country, the peasant recites a number of couplets in praise of each month: 539 805 821 ●

"'Friend,' said January, 'what do people say about January in your part of the world?'[1]

The poor man answered, 'It is a month of rain and of plenty. Vegetables grow and all that your heart can desire.'

'Do you know any rhymes about it?' asked January.

'Just imagine asking!' cried the poor man. 'As many as ever you like.'

'Tell me some, please,' said January.

The poor man then repeated the three following: 'January sits in the cosiest nook in the house. A warm January makes full barns in the summer. The January moon brings the girls out of the caves for they think it is daylight.'

January smiled and the others laughed. Then February took up the running. 'Friend, what do they say about February?'

[1] GALEA AND MURRAY, op. cit.

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'He is January's own brother, bless him,' said the poor man. 'Quantities of rain and everyone satisfied, for February fills up all and brings riches to the peasant's house. In the month of February all mistakes are discovered. In February sow, water, and tend the small-leaved basil.'

'What a lot you know!' they all cried.

'Friend,' said March, 'what about March?'

'Days long and beautiful,' answered the peasant. 'The cold braces you like iron, and a little wind is always desirable.'

The poor man answered in this way each question of the rest of the months, letting his tongue wag in their honour, praising each one up to the skies."

The merchant, in reply to the same set of questions, complains bitterly about each month. The peasant is given a magic cloth of the sort used to cover bread, which provides him and his family with food and drink in plenty. The rich merchant receives a stick which beats him and his wife unmercifully every time it is addressed.

821 787

Apart from the expected, usual characters of the twelve months, there is a method whereby the year's weather may be foretold. The twelve days preceding Christmas Eve are known as "presages." Each day foretells the weather of its corresponding month during the forthcoming year. Here, again, is seen the shadow of Mithra—the "Great Fecundator"—no period could be more ominous than the sacred twelve days preceding his feast.

FAITH

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Where knowledge fails or some error in complying with the traditional rules is made, Faith steps in. A farmer will send for the village priest to bless his fields when he has sown